

First records for Djibouti of Hottentot Teal *Anas hottentota*, Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*, Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* and Mangrove Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus avicenniae*

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Premières données pour Djibouti de la Sarcelle hottentote *Anas hottentota*, du Blongios de Chine *Ixobrychus sinensis*, de la Locustelle lusciniôïde *Locustella luscinioides* et de la Rousserolle des mangroves *Acrocephalus scirpaceus avicenniae*. Trois espèces et une sous-espèce nouvelles pour Djibouti sont documentées. Une Sarcelle hottentote *Anas hottentota* a été photographiée au Lac Abhé, Dikhil, le 30 décembre 2013. Dans la mangrove de Godoria, deux Blongios de Chine *Ixobrychus sinensis* ont été observés le 1er janvier 2014 et une Locustelle lusciniôïde *Locustella luscinioides* y a été capturée le 10 janvier 2014. Dans la même mangrove, huit Rousserolles des mangroves *Acrocephalus scirpaceus avicenniae* ont été capturées entre le 1er et le 11 janvier 2014.

During a stay in Djibouti at the turn of the year 2013/14 to study *Acrocephalus* warblers, three new species for the country were recorded. The form *avicenniae* of *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* (Mangrove Reed Warbler) was also recorded for the first time. The occurrence of these taxa is not mentioned in the relevant literature (e.g. Laurent 1990, Welch & Welch 1998, Redman *et al.* 2011) nor in the current ABC checklist of the birds of Djibouti (Dowsett *et al.* 2013).

Hottentot Teal *Anas hottentota*

On 30 December 2013 at 09.30–09.45 hrs, we observed a juvenile Hottentot Teal next to a small pool from hot springs in the south-east of Lac Abhé in Dikhil (11°06'8.42"N 41°53'40.68"E; Figs. 1–2). It clearly was disturbed by our approach and flew off to the south-west. The dark cap, pale cheeks, pale blue bill-sides and dark neck-smudge were noted. In flight the bird showed a green speculum with a white trailing



Figures 1–2. Hottentot Teal / Sarcelle hottentote *Anas hottentota*, Lac Abhé, Dikhil, Djibouti, 30 December 2013 (Jens Hering)



Figure 3. Location of the sighting of a Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*, Godoria mangroves, Obock, Djibouti, 1 January 2014 (Jens Hering)

Endroit où un Blongios de Chine *Ixobrychus sinensis* a été observé, mangrove de Godoria, Obock, Djibouti, 1er janvier 2014 (Jens Hering)

edge and a black-and-white underwing. The absence of dark brown spots on the head and body are indicative of a juvenile prior to its first full moult into adult plumage, as are the suggestion of somewhat dark streaks on the underparts and pale-coloured fringes to the feathers on the back. Additionally, the crown was not dark brown as in the adult, and the ear patch was smaller and paler. Hottentot Teal is a widespread and fairly common non-breeding visitor in Ethiopia (Ash & Atkins 2009). There is also a record in southern Somalia from 1934 (Ash & Mitchell 1998).

Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*

Several days of searching for Yellow Bittern in Godoria mangrove swamp (12°09'4.15"N 43°24'37.27"E) finally proved successful on 1 January 2014. At c.14.30 hrs an adult climbed just above the roots in a c.3 m-high stand of Grey Mangrove *Avicennia marina* at the east edge of the area (Fig. 3). It was seen for c.10 seconds. During this short period the pale, buffish plumage was immediately apparent. The mantle, back and

wing-coverts were clay-brown, and the rectrices black. The black of the primaries and outer coverts could not be seen. The underparts and neck-sides were cream-coloured, and the crown was asphalt-grey. At 17.00 hrs on the same day, at low tide, a further sighting was made in the large mangrove lagoon. A Yellow Bittern remained for c.1 minute at a mud pool c.150 m away before disappearing into the adjacent thicket. Due to the brevity of the observation, the distance and the unfavourable light conditions, no identifiable photographs could be obtained. A further search at different locations, especially at dusk and using playback of our own recordings from Egypt (*cf.* Hering *et al.* 2013b), was unsuccessful. It should be noted that outside the breeding season, a reaction is probably not to be expected. The potential confusion species, Little Bittern *I. minutus*, has only been recorded once in Djibouti, on 16 May 1990 at Minkille (G. Welch *in litt.* 2014).

In respect of the occurrence of the Yellow Bittern in Djibouti, further studies are necessary, especially during the breeding season (probably



Figures 4–5. Savi's Warbler / Locustelle lusciniöide *Locustella luscinioides*, Godoria mangroves, Obock, Djibouti, 10 January 2014 (Jens Hering)

from February/March). A good example has been set by studies carried out in mangrove swamps in southern Egypt (Hering *et al.* 2013b). Here, in 2012, the first record of the species for mainland Africa and the Western Palearctic was made, and the species has been recorded breeding. Data on the behaviour, breeding biology and range expansion, etc., can be found in Barthel & Hering (2013), which summarises knowledge about Yellow Bittern to date.

Elsewhere in the region, Yellow Bittern has been observed only on Socotra, where it was first recorded in 1999, when a juvenile was photographed on 19 November (Aspinall *et al.* 2004). This was followed by sightings of juveniles in March–December 2008 and an adult in April 2008 and February 2009, and finally a juvenile or winter-plumaged adult in February 2011 (Porter & Suleiman 2014). Breeding is suspected, but has not been confirmed (Porter & Suleiman 2014).

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*

On 10 January 2014 at 08.00 hrs, a Savi's Warbler was mist-netted between *Avicennia* bushes in the large Godoria mangrove swamp lagoon (Figs. 4–5). The following features were noted: uniformly reddish brown with dirty grey underparts, reddish brown-green flanks and

unmarked breast; undertail-coverts rusty beige with a suggestion of paler feather tips; short, indistinct, pale supercilium; broad tail with fine, dark, horizontal bands above; legs pink-brown. Wing length 70.5 mm. A blood sample was taken for DNA analysis. Savi's Warbler is known to winter in Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Kenya (Nicolaus 1987, Pearson *et al.* 1988, Ash & Atkins 2010, Kennerley & Pearson 2010).

Mangrove Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus avicenniae*

On 30 December 2013 at 14.00 hrs, two reed warblers were heard singing in *Avicennia* bushes on the east side of Godoria mangrove, near the tourist camp. Alarm calls were also heard. Using playback we were able to encourage four more individuals to sing at four different locations. On 31 December, two Mangrove Reed Warblers (Fig. 6) and a Eurasian Reed Warbler *A. s. fuscus* were trapped, measured and samples taken for DNA analysis. More Mangrove Reed Warblers were caught and examined on 1, 6, 10 and 11 January; we thus collected biometric data and blood samples from eight individuals. There was an unmistakable difference between the migrant or wintering Eurasian Reed Warblers ($n = 4$, wing 65–67 mm, mean 66 mm) and the presumed



Figure 6. Mangrove Reed Warbler / Rousserolle des mangroves *Acrocephalus scirpaceus avicenniae*, Godoria mangroves, Obock, Djibouti, 31 December 2013 (Jens Hering)

resident *avicenniae*. The shorter, rounder wings (57–60 mm, mean 58 mm) left no doubt as to the subspecific identity of the latter (*cf.* Kennerley & Pearson 2010). They were olive-brown above and creamy white below. The majority of the birds caught had more or less heavily worn plumage, especially the tail feathers.

Mangrove Reed Warbler, which was described by Ash *et al.* (1989), is endemic to the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden region and was hitherto known, on the African coast, from southern Egypt south to Eritrea and in northern Somalia, but not yet from Djibouti (Redman *et al.* 2009, Kennerley & Pearson 2010). In Djibouti, there have been previous sightings in mangroves of unidentified, unstreaked *Acrocephalus* warblers south of Khor Angur, c.30 km north of the records reported here, on 27 March 1984 (1–2 birds), around Djibouti harbour on 1 April 1984 (at least six birds) and at Godoria, probably at the same site as mentioned here, on 5–7 March 1990 (at least six) (G. Welch *in litt.* 2014).

In contrast to Clamorous Reed Warbler *A. stentoreus brunnescens*, which is common in the area and was singing intensively during our stay (Hering *in prep.*), the full song of Mangrove Reed Warbler is not distinctive. The distribution, behaviour and breeding biology of both taxa are still inadequately known (Ash *et al.* 1989, Kennerley & Pearson 2010, Hering *et al.* 2011, 2012, 2013a, Porter & Stanton 2011).

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First record of Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* for Tunisia

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Première observation du Chevalier à pattes jaunes *Tringa flavipes* en Tunisie. Le 18 mars 2014 un Chevalier à pattes jaunes *Tringa flavipes* a été observé près de Douz, Tunisie. Ceci constitue la première donnée pour le pays. Cette espèce nord-américaine a déjà été observée plusieurs fois au Maroc, mais il n'y a pas de mentions pour l'Algérie ni pour la Libye.

In March 2014 I led my first birding tour of Tunisia for Birdwatching Breaks. We began the morning of 18 March with a visit to some wetlands on the outskirts of Douz. Our first stop was at an area of reed-fringed shallow pools (at c.33°28'40.39"N 8°56'56.52"E) where a quick scan revealed the presence of waders such as Ruff *Calidris pugnax*, Wood *Tringa glareola* and Marsh Sandpipers *T. stagnatalis*, and Spotted Redshank *T. erythropus*. In the perfect light conditions, with early-morning sunshine behind us, I decided to check the area more thoroughly, and so we set up

our telescopes to check through the waders. After just a couple of minutes I came across a *Tringa* that was facing me on a raised clump of flattened reeds. It was clearly larger and taller than the nearby Wood Sandpipers. The breast was suffused brownish grey and the belly contrastingly white. The bill was intermediate in length between that of the nearby Wood and Marsh Sandpipers, and the legs appeared to be bright yellow. I quickly realised that I was watching a Lesser Yellowlegs *T. flavipes*, a species with which I am familiar from regular trips to North America and also having